



The Quad

Volume 10, Issue 1

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Thanks and Dedications

The Quad extends its thanks to Dr. Kenneth McClane, our advisor; David L. Greenbaum, our founder; The Temple of Zeus Cafe; the Student Assembly Finance Commission (SAFC); Arnold's Printing Services; and especially all who have submitted work for consideration.

This issue of the Quad is dedicated to everyone involved in undergrad art and literature at Cornell, Wegman's Golden Sweet Corn, and Moss E. Stone.



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Editor's Note

Thank you for picking up this semester's edition of The Quad, a literary magazine celebrating its tenth year of publication. We've spent countless hours tinkering and refining the following pages specifically for your personal enjoyment, even though we probably don't even know you (for those we do know, "Hello, hello. We've missed you. You look gorgeous. Have you lost weight? We love that haircut"). We believe in an egalitarian magazine, which is we vote on all submissions anonymously. We believe in the representation and glorification of Cornell's creative community. Finally, we believe in domestic pets, specifically the Bengal striped kitten. Good day, and enjoy.

-Billy and Dmitry

Staff Haiku

Things sold in a box:
shoes, thin mints, wedding rings, free
kittens, self-image

- Billy

Sharp sins and no guilt
eyes and tea
a lone smoker

- Anastasia

The end petals green
is near rain and buzzing tree
never more echo

- Lucy

and suddenly ...
like cotton fields in bloom
set on fire

- Deniz

prone to disagree
crisp nights may be all too warm
suns a dying star

- Madeleine

Fine, grandiloquent
pomputaunts *would* use such re-
dicolous words.

- Dmitry

High-jacker eyelash
threaten's to corrupt that sweet
chaste infinity

- Nicky

What is a haiku?
Oh crap, I don't remember.
I just won't write one.

- Brian

Quality of life
Can be much improved with some
Soft, clean, jersey sheets

- Marina

sometimes staircases
melt into sub-marine squelch
silver fish swim by

- Emily

Witch of Babylon
Sucks oil with cerise lips
—Kylix cleaves open.

- Yasir

Around the corner
Daffodils and daisies spring
Up beneath the snow

- Liz

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Barbeque

They were little boys once
Replete with bottle rocket dreams
Pockets lined with graham cracker crumbs
driven in bright blue matchbox cars
sailing in the sea of a mud puddle

Something along the way twisted, imploded
Star shooting into endlessness
deeper voices cracked
out of the shells of each childhood

friendship complicated itself
timelessly
until a night in July
without wives
without minivans
just good beer and fireflies
to find the sparklers of seven years old

they remembered it brazenly
this time before school books
before drive-ins
when there was only the creaky red wagon
full of water and tadpoles and sunshine

by Emily Scheines



by Yasir Nawaz

WEIGHTLIFTING

A steam press
mess of baboons
gorillas and chimpanzees
lifting and pushing
their weights
in bars and plates
swinging through
their mechanical jungle
sided with mirrors
so they can watch
as they go.

I asked my friend
“So how many monkeys does it take to make a man?”
he sank his eyebrows and said
“I don’t know. What kind of tools do they have?”

by T. J. Myron



by Brian Stewart

Burne-Jones' Ophelia

At first, nothing
but rushes and cold water,
and the willows' snaky tendrils
swaying gently in the breeze.
Then we see the girl, gone
horizontal in the stream,
her hair spread on the surface,
a film of red and gold.
Her eyes half-open, sleepy, icy blue,
her hands splayed open at her sides
as if preparing
to be crucified, lips parted
to suck in one last breath— a final line
of high clear melody, a song so piercing
it could well draw blood.
We see her floating down the river,
taste the brine on her cheeks in streaks
and glistening; the rest is mud,
dust into dust again.
Her skirts whirl helplessly
around the vortex of her thighs,
darkening slowly as they take on water.

by Andrea Giedinghagen



by Laurel Ingraham

Focus

Soft focus: A deliberate slight lack of clarity and definition in a photograph. It's also an acting technique. The actor doesn't focus on one particular object but instead takes in at once everything going on onstage. He's aware of his surroundings and can react accordingly. I'm loading boxes of my stuff – books, music, clothes, papers, – into the back of my Volvo but I'm not focusing on them. A red folder marked “law apps” falls out of one of the boxes. Instinctively I stick it into my black leather messenger bag, next to a binder marked “film stuff.” I'm not focused on anything. Soft focus. The actor reacts before he sees. Michelle is behind me with her arms folded across her chest

(cut to: my chin resting between Michelle's bare breasts as I stare into her eyes and we both smile. When she smiles she bites her lower lip just a little bit as if she's trying to suppress a laugh.)

and biting her lip hard, not because she's smiling but because she's fighting back something – tears or obscenities or . Probably obscenities. I react though I don't see her as she watches me back out the driveway, barely missing her mailbox because the boxes are so high in the back. Maybe she's already gone inside. She's probably not bothered by this whole thing

(cut to: Michelle going back inside our – her – house, closing the door and lying down on our – her – bed. She buries her face in a pillow and doesn't move for about five minutes, after which she fixes herself a cup of coffee (low-fat milk with no sugar in a glass, not a mug) and reads the New York *Times* at our – her – dining room table.

(close up on: 19 killed in Uzbek terror attacks, blast... FDA delays new food safety proposals...)

as much as I am. It was her idea. I take my time pulling out and as I drive away my focus shifts from everything to nothing; anymore, I'm not noticing or reacting to my surroundings and my surroundings are not reacting to me.

Rack focus: to shift focus from one character to another within a shot, such as from foreground to background. Filmmakers use it to direct the audience's attention and to indicate where a character is looking or what he's paying attention to. Think the axe murderer in the

foreground, and as he goes out of focus the young couple moving into the new house in the background becomes clear.

(cut to: rack focus from my head to the picture of Michelle on the dashboard.

(song cue: REM's "Nightswimming" (Track 11, *Automatic For The People*, Warner Brothers 1992))

The photograph on the dashboard, taken years ago

I pull off the dashboard a picture of Michelle and debate throwing it out the window. Tearing it up. Burning it with the car's cigarette lighter. But instead I stare at it until the light turns green and the car behind me blows his horn and I slip it down between my seat and the emergency brake. I bite my lip the way Michelle used to – does –.

Turned around backwards so the windshield shows

Now the dashboard seems disconcertingly bare. That picture had been there for so long removing it left a 4x6 rectangle free of dust. I toss up there the Style section of the *Times* that I pull from my bag,

Every streetlight reveals the picture in reverse

which fills the void
but doesn't help. Maybe I should just put the picture back. I'm not mad at her for kicking me out. I don't want to just forget about her. I didn't throw the picture out.

(cut to: Michelle standing over a trash can with a framed picture of us at some scenic overlook. Michelle closing the lid of the trash can and instead putting the picture in her bottom desk drawer, the big drawer that people like my father use for files but most people just use for junk like pictures of their old boyfriends.)

My phone rings

(cut to: My father closing his file drawer and then calling my cell phone.)

and I answer it not looking at who it was obviously thinking it was Michelle and the first thing that I think about when I hear my father's voice is hanging up, but I don't. My father had a vested interest in my being with Michelle because her father is on the board of admissions for Harvard Law and my father is just that kind of opportunist.

(cut to: My father meeting Michelle's father at a dinner party last summer.

The night they met was on our 6 month anniversary, which Michelle made us call a semi-anniversary, (because "anni" means year and she was – is – picky like that.) Her father and my father hit it off even better than Michelle and I first did.

(cut to: Michelle and me walking into the room where my father and her father have started discussing the outcome of the Democratic primary.

(cut to: My father gushing over (Michelle and) her dad as I drive him home.)

He seems terribly disappointed when I tell him what just happened, but not in the way I had expected. He actually seems genuinely concerned for my happiness. I tell him it was for the best and that we're gonna stay friends and of course I'm still applying to Harvard and Princeton and Stanford and my father tells me that he's proud of me and that he's glad I have the opportunities that he didn't have when he was my age but he worries that my grades won't be enough. And now I know why he sounded so concerned. He starts to tell me about how he paid his way through a state school

Montage: A series of short shots edited together to create a certain emotional effect.

(cut to: montage of my father pulling himself up by his proverbial bootstraps, working in a mailroom, buying his first suit, conniving his way up the ladder, making his parents proud.)

because he didn't have the upbringing that I've had. He encourages me to reconcile with Michelle, he tells me stories of what he and my mother went through, he tells me how Michelle is a really great girl. I run a red light and accuse him of merely being interested in my getting into Harvard. When he was my age he would have killed to get into that good a law school. Harvard will afford me certain opportunities that SUNY didn't give him. He reiterates that he's worried my grades aren't good enough. He brings up how a year off

(cut to: me hitchhiking around Europe after college like some coming-of-age movie.)

was fine but that it's been two and a half years since I finished school and

(cut to: me meeting Michelle in some café in Berlin and striking up a conversation on being American in Europe, Tom Ford leaving Gucci, the studio where David Bowie recorded *Low*, *Heroes*, and *Lodger* (RCA 1977, 1977, and 1979, respectively), writing her honors thesis on Kierkegaard, why East German girls are hot, .)

they

wouldn't look too kindly on how I spent said years.

(cut to: me getting an apartment in Providence and shooting movies on a Sony Handicam while she completes her undergraduate degree at Brown.)

I tell him I appreciate his concern and that I'll think about the situation and that I'm driving through a tunnel which I'm not and that I'll call him back which I won't.

(cut to: me in New York meeting Michelle at The Four Seasons for our first anniversary. Close up on the little blue Tiffany's box. Naturally she says yes.

(cut to: me moving my stuff into her house.

(cut to: 3 months of complacency and boring satisfaction.

(cut to: our – her – decision that we're not ready to get married yet.

My apartment is dusty and slightly unkempt but the kids to whom I was subletting did a decent job keeping it up all things considered and they were very good about getting out a week earlier than they had planned. Setting up my laptop on the kitchen table and spreading my papers around it goes a long way toward making the place feel like home again. I finger through the shit I just poured out of my messenger bag. Law school app, law school app, the picture of Michelle I brought in from the car, storyboard notebook, law school app, audition

flier, mini-DV tapes, . I sit staring at my table for a good ten minutes. My father calls my phone but the ringer's off so I don't notice until he hangs up. I don't call him back.

(cut to: my father worrying about my future.)

Michelle calls after my father gives up. I don't answer but I stare at the caller ID for a while.

Eventually I decide that what I need to do is sort out the contents of my bag, of my boxes, my life, . First thing out of my boxes is a metal file box with folders marked school, finances, work, . Next thing out is a paper shredder my father insisted that I buy to protect myself from identity theft. I start going through my papers, my future, my . My phone rings again. It's Michelle again and this time I answer.

I left some CDs at the – her – house. My apartment is in pretty good shape. I'm just gonna get settled in tonite. Buy some food. Maybe we should have dinner. I thought we said we needed time apart.

As we're talking I plug in the shredder and start getting rid of the shit I don't need. What my father calls security. I roll my eyes as I think of his paranoia.

(close up on: the documents going through the shredder: Harvard application, Stanford application, Yale application)

(cut to: the "film stuff" binder left on the table)

(cut to: the picture of Michelle on top of the binder.)



by Konstantin Shishkin

Auge

I do not want to pass my life seeking that verse that does not exist
- Extremoduro

I think of that blue rose that I will never give you
that day I will never remember.
gniees your yellow perfume would be too cruel,
gnibmoc your gray eyes,
 gnillems your black thought.
 gniraeh green music with you would be atrocious.
Knowing that while you seem to hear, you are thinking.
Or seeing your hair turned into blue ashes,
your arid rebel eyes tortured by the bitter wind,
Your skin corroded by the sea.
I have confused the adjectives, inverted the verbs.
But I will never be able to forget your smile.

by Santiago Suarez-Rubio



O'Hare on a Sunday

There are nuns in the airport
Shocking until I realize
that they're not forbidden from places
so metallic
I'm mixing them up with the Amish
comparing sex to electricity
And the purr of six cylinder engines.
Their robes are white
Sisters and yet brides in empty beds
Denied widows, crescendos dominae
echoes of soprano sopophoria
Paler than even they should be,
Against these shining floors and walls of glass
In "an airport that can take you anywhere
and a city you never want to leave"
They defy everything around them with their presence
Hurrying back, flying back
To rosary beads clicking in tall rooms smelling of stone

If they could see us
In the early dawn
The whole crowd of them invisible around the foot of our bed
Daughters of a golden eve
Circled against each other
Breathing each others downbeats
Peaceful for the first night in months

Would there be revulsion?
Of the kind saved for deep cuts and brown spiders?
Or could they pull back soft blue blankets
And see how beautiful it is
Two puzzle pieces, two spoons
So indelibly lucky

They shuffle away while
Everyone gape giggles after them
And I'm stuck with my wondering
Of whether nuns can ever be happy for anyone
Who wasn't as strong or as frigid as they were

by Emily Scheines

Takeoff

back and stop.

She's screaming out
with banshee pubescence,
snapping gum between
shrill syllables,
mimicking lunacy.
And he responds
with a voice faux
low, covering acne
consciousness,
hairless legs.
"We are soo
going to Israel."
"Totally."
Flight attendants
contort robotic limbs,
pretend to burn,
drown, evacuate.
We've seen it all
before, but safety
quotas are insatiable,
protocol sacred.

out and up.

A green, hazy cougher's
lung sky from below,
and everyone,
"We breathe that air?"
and someone,
"You can't see it when
you're in it,"
and she,

"I heard that breathing
L.A. air is, like, smoking
a cigarette a day,"
and he,
"Shut up. Let's play
truth or dare."
And the attendants
are swinging their
arms, wearing
inflatable necklaces,
and she,
"Dare."
And he's nervous,
'kiss me' too much,
'lick your friend's
arm' too lame,
and the ring of smog
pads the nothingness
like a malignant
halo, blanketing
the soon halogen
from sight,
and he dares her
to kiss him,
and she,
"Gross, no way,"
and he,
"Whatever, slut,"
and she,
"My dad smokes
two packs a day."

by Billy Tobenkin



by Brian Mendelson



by Brian Mendelson



by Brian Mendelson



by Brian Mendelson

Anorexic photographed from behind

first her spine,
a line of stones
 beneath the onion-skin thin
stretched taut, a drumhead
 over the old bone frame.

And next the sloping ridges
of the ribs, like fingers splayed
in silent expectation.
The steady paring off of flesh,
the hungry chisel,
removes all that is not. Essential,
she remains,
legs like a crane's
folded beneath the belly
that won't bleed—
her shoulder blades apparent,
spread like wings

 As if she meant to soar into the blue
and leave the body's frailties
far behind.

by Andrea Giedinghagen

To Begin With

As infant monkeys love cages of gauze and wire,
Hairless children fashion necks for friends,
Clutch the foster,
Pull it, steadfast, into their own hearts.

Gauze is close enough to fur,
Give close enough to flesh,
Wire to bone.

With wide eyes, dark and bottomless
As the prostrate mouths of young birds.

Fingers subsumed as hooks,
Appended to eager hands,
A vice of young and tenuous arms

about this thing—haphazard,
adored.

Pawed worn and threadbare,
Soft to skin as skin,
The heart given, gives back.

They begin so:
Fastened to dolls,
Ears addressed to taught, thickened chests.
They press to hear the muted pulse
and muffled exhalation,
a lullaby caroming in a livid chest.

by Connor Puleo

I.

(Come times I have sat
and wondered
whether you were thin-
king there, your eyes
pulled white.)

Other days,
I have gone down to the water
and been amazed. that anyone
could smell , just, of lifesavers
and skin.
(in these, though
in places where we've floated boats

It could not have been difficult;
his freckles shone through from the inside

II.

this was the year dad's legs get thinner his beard got gone
summer I learned to close the door, learned to drive
the smell of men. father takes shots nights leaves gauze
sitting on the counter

year mom and dad's bathroom stops smelling like sex
, summer I could not touch a tomato)

III.

still the boats come back (the same, not always) but the smell

old man fishing wild boy, laughing!
wild james hicock! buffaflo bill-kid Fairchild!
Hoppalong Cassidy and the gang

my sister chimes in — (and her a poppy) but mother was
cross was this thing from her mouth, thing that men say

(our boat is green and there is a picture of us in it)

IV.

this is the year the cup flipper disappears, more famous in life than in death

my sisters stop drinking juice from boxes and,
when the kids come up from lots in,
cardboard sword and pickaxe: when the kids come up
for the least days of summer we do not go with them.

by Amanda Waldo

Imagine

*“Just because you feel it,
doesn’t mean its there.”*

-T. York

At work she waits half-impatiently for him. She visualizes his image, now faded like an ancient photograph, yellowed and cracked, ringing the bell when he opens the door, walking up to the counter and smiling as he recognizes her. She imagines his entrance in all of its modalities, she lingers in the possibilities.

When it actually happens she isn’t surprised, she has imagined him enough; the repetition of his entrance in her mind seems to make his actual arrival seem imaginary. Without expectation he opens the door. He is in a rush. He has finally come. They both stop and stand up straighter, smile a little sinister, he says, “Now look who it is.”

Much has happened since Jane has seen him last. Besides her being a few pounds heavier and her hair a little shorter, she has become a ‘meanwhile’ girl. Jane considers herself to be in a constant, unthreatening state of expectancy. Her life has stagnated; she is waiting for something to happen, a job, a love, an awesome, life-changing car accident, just something. She tells her friends her relationship with her boyfriend (“he’s cute and nice” –both adjectives she finds condescending and nondescript) is a ‘meanwhile’ relationship. She is waiting for the real love of her life to show up, for those initial sparks with other men to finally materialize.

Tommy, her condescending pet-name for her boyfriend, was the first near-stranger to come up to her and give her his number, eyes downcast, hands slightly shaking, and say “call me sometime, if you like.” The gesture was flattering; she had had only one conversation with him, when she was, as she describes it, “blind drunk,” and therefore did not remember a single word. He said, “I just remembered that night we talked about David Bowie and I kept thinking about you, I made you a mix.”

What she does remember about the night they met was a female acquaintance, Kris, approaching her after she saw them talking to tell her that she was sleeping with him, that he had a huge penis and that she wanted him to be her boyfriend. Jane admits to herself and no one else that she is a spiteful woman. Jane will even admit to herself that Tommy’s original appeal was that he was ‘taken,’ that Jane was already warned that he was off-limits when it came to the rules of appropriate social behavior.

Because of her spite she ignores certain qualities about Tommy that irritate her. He isn’t very attractive, too skinny. He never makes eye contact, bad teeth, and talks about his ex-girlfriend constantly. Furthermore, he isn’t smart enough for her. Most of all, her spite allows her to ignore her indifference to him.

“Daniel, where’ve you been all my life?” She pauses waiting for her joke to sink in. He looks confused, as if he were trying to place her face in his memory, then smiles in recognition. “It’s been about a year right?” Jane says shrugging her shoulders and resting her fists on her hips.

“Well, I’m working in the city now, I came back to get some stuff I left when I moved, you know, furniture. I also have to do some work on my dissertation.” Jane thinks Daniel looks exactly the same, his hair is shorter but still light, tall, freckled. His glasses a bit askew, but still the same. She adores how he would never avert his eyes when talking to her; his sexy, subtle suggestions of confidence.

“How long are you here for?”

“I’m leaving right now, but I’ll be in and out for the next few months.”

“Well, you should drop me a line, we should get together.”

“Yeah, all of us should get together, the usual suspects. Speaking of which, have you seen any of them lately?”

“I’ve been seeing Autumn around once in a while.” Autumn is a girl who recently grew into her sexuality and didn’t know how to conduct herself with it, except by abrasively flaunting it to every male in sight. She finally realized the power of sex, but has yet to realize that her power lies in the assumption that she is powerless, that she is just personifying the fantasy of every man she meets, losing her self in the meantime. Jane, not being a man, could not find her beautiful despite the fact that Autumn was the right combination of features, tall, thin, buxom, straight smile and always wearing close to nothing. Jane won’t say it out loud, but she used to be threatened by Autumn. She was threatened by the thought that beauty, upon first glance, always beats personality.

Jane was acquainted with these so-called ‘usual suspects’ because they worked together collecting data on red-backed salamanders in an isolated patch of moist land in a remote town in northern Massachusetts. Jane got the job out of college believing that she wanted to pursue a career in environmental science. After this job, she realized she would prefer to dabble in everything except commitment.

During that summer, Jane and Daniel found themselves in the inoffensive relationship of coworkers. She liked him the moment she met him, he was charming and dryly humorous, and completely overlooked Jane to focus on the showy Autumn, who wore feathers in her hair and a shirt with the playboy emblem on it. She was so obvious.

Jane knows Autumn to be utterly unveiled at all times. Her body and her personality were so blatant, so visible. She lacked the true seduction of subtly, the veiled glimpses of sexuality, a patch of bare skin accidentally showing, the VPL (visible panty line). The seduction of the imagination, the nearly visible, unbearably invisible.

“Yeah, she sucks,” Daniel says with a predatorial laugh.

Jane looks across the café she works at, over the half-filled tables into the mirror meant to make the dining room seem larger and sees her manager glaring at her.

“Daniel, do you need anything to drink, coffee for the road?”

“Sure, large coffee.” She gives it to him and before he walks out of the door he turns, looks at her straightly and says, “Behave yourself Jane,” as if he knew a secret about her.

After a quarter of a lifetime being overlooked by men, Jane, out of necessity, developed the skills to attract attention by other means. She grew into a personality, one that was entertaining, a little

scandalous, and externally amiable. She learned to suppress her cynicism with a sarcastic inner monologue, expressing a tough compassion that, while forced, seemed sincere. Overall, she was a riot.

She could be beautiful, too. If she wore her coarse, burnished hair short, curled around her face, her glassy azure eyes would gleam brighter. If she wore the right clothes, black to hide the weight but adventurous enough to infuse a certain amount of confidence, she could be striking.

But she was always overlooked at first. Always had to prove that she was worth talking to in spite of that fact she wasn't beautiful.

And so Daniel finally paid attention. After, of course, Autumn's coquettish banter became tedious and ended up simply childish. Everyone on the team paid attention. Jane was a certain kind of enigma. Jane dropped enough hints about her life that they began to speculate about her. They assumed every time she wore a scarf she was hiding hickies. They always prodded her about her men, of which she had many, but temporarily, usually only one night. She was shameless and they were fascinated, Daniel, being attracted to the rambunctious and the taboo, was especially so.

Finally, after almost three months of minimal exchanges alone and a handful of nights spent drinking with the rest of the group, Daniel's gaze rested less with Autumn and more with Jane. The day before he was leaving town for a brief period to work on his dissertation (Jane not recalling what exactly he was studying) he casually sat beside her at dinner for the first time. Periodically their knees would touch under the table and Jane lost her appetite because of her excitement. He was easy to talk to, easy to listen to. He gave her the perfect amount of eye contact and Jane loved being watched.

"I really appreciated what you said to Autumn about masturbation," he said when they were alone together, sitting beside each other on the dock on the lake they researched. He was recalling a drunken night where Autumn was particularly showy and Jane could not help herself.

"Oh yeah, when she was talking about how she had never done it, and I said something, what did I say?"

"You said how does she expect a man to know her body if she doesn't even know her body. It was perfect," he said as one of his dangling legs brushed up against hers. "You're really something, you know, you have this something. You could really help someone like Autumn, she's so innocent and oblivious. She needs some girl friends, someone really strong and confident, like you."

Jane was sure they had a perfect connection; one of those sparks that you can't forget. In retrospect she recalled this date as a blurry dream, too idyllic to be real. They talked for hours, the moon's shaky reflection vibrating on the horizon, sporadically throwing pools of light on their faces. She felt honest with him. He made her feel smarter and more beautiful. He asked her a lot about her sexual escapades, but she never minded talking about her scandals. They seemed to reaffirm the parts of her personality that she was most proud of. The parts of her personality that made her different from most girls, the parts that made her look 'cool' and adventurous, even a little dangerous.

As she looked over the water, smoking another in a train of cigarettes; she knew he was watching her. She hoped he was wanting her.

Eventually it got too cold to stay out any longer, and with him leaving in the morning they walked towards the cabins. They stood in front of her door. She waited. She was terrified. Jane tended to collapse at the last moment, losing all of her nerve. All she wanted to do was kiss him. Moments passed. "If I could just look him in the eyes," she thought, "then I could kiss him, then it would

happen.” She was looking at the doorknob. “Look him in the eyes, lift your head, why are you afraid?” Internally scolding herself for her weakness, her inability to control her emotions.

“Well, I guess I’ll see you around when I get back, a few months,” he finally said before Jane could peel her eyes off the doorknob.

Weighted by disappointment, her skin felt sunken, her veins strained, she said, “yes, I’ll see you later, have a good trip. Behave yourself Daniel.”

She turned, gripped the doorknob and as she began to open the door, Daniel said, “Wait.”

“Yeah?”

“You’re really something.” He smiled and turned and left.

Now here she was, working a lame job in food service, placating the customers, vaguely waiting for him, his ghost everywhere. She used to picture him in the most ordinary of places. Reclining on a chair in the sun, always with brightness around him. She would see him walking by the water, turning to laugh at one of his own jokes. She imagined casually bumping into him as she was walking through town, passing him outside of an Italian restaurant, in the sun. He would comment on her sunglasses, she would make a joke, “the sun never sets on coolness.” He would have heard it before, but laughed anyway. She thought with enough reflection she could will him to appear.

Finally he had appeared, his specter fleeing, replaced by his reality. Finally she could stop imagining what could happen with the unrealized potential that she thought existed between them, and realize it. Of course she was aware of the power of her imaginings. Of course she knew that there was a certain amount of appeal in his absence. She had the ability to create his personality. In these months apart he became her perfect man, she sculpted his personality by combining the clay bits of reality and the designing hand of her fantasies. She filled in the blanks.

She would have to fill no longer. He was back.

She walks through the familiar door to Tommy’s apartment. He always leaves the door a little ajar, it would stick too much if closed all the way, with her hands full she could open the door by slamming her hip against it. She thinks she is sexy when she does this. He is cooking something as he usually is when she enters from outside into the kitchen. His dishes are always piled up, partially cleaned, rinsed but not dried, soapy but not rinsed, always in a transitional state of clean. She walks up to him as he turns from whatever it is he is cooking for her and kisses him lightly on his lips, lips just licked for her. She then walks past him to the living room saying “how was your day.” She only gives him partial attention, he usually says the same thing anyway, “monotonous” or “boring” or he tells a story about how he fucked things up and the boss yelled at him.

She drops her purse in the same spot she always does, beside an orange chair. She finds comfort in consistency in Tommy’s apartment, with Tommy in the kitchen, cooking her dinner, kissing her wetly.

She walks back to the kitchen to talk to him and smoke a cigarette.

“I had an amazing moment today after work,” she says, looking past Tommy towards the front door, “I went to one of those publicity nights at the museum downtown. You know, where they have free food and bad music. They were serving wine that you could pay for. I had a glass and went up to

the counter for more when I finished it and this girl, the catering bartender, wearing the typical starched white shirt and black tie (I always find that uniform absurd) well, she was cleaning these bottles of wine when I asked her for another glass. She was standing there, wiping these full bottles of wine and said to me, 'we don't have any wine left, I'm sorry.' It was so bizarre, there was obviously wine, and she just apologized, 'we don't have any wine.' Very Kubrick or something."

"Ha, that is weird. It was just the language she used—" he says, squinting his eyes as he thinks. She can see him mapping out his sentences as he looks up at the ceiling.

"Exactly, if she would have just phrased it differently..." Jane runs her fingers through her hair, "Ahh" she says when she finds a sore spot.

"What is it baby?"

"I think it's a zit or something, it kills."

"I'm sorry babe, do you want me to go out and get anything for you."

"You're so nice, don't worry about it spaz."

"Look, Jane, I have an idea, we should go out, have a romantic night. You have been working a lot lately, I feel like we haven't been seeing a lot of each other..."

Jane allows her mind to travel as he spoke, repeating the scene with Daniel over and over. Hoping she looked pretty, said the right things, thinking of other combinations of the conversation. She fingers the zit on her head as she thinks, inflicting a controlled amount of pain. "He was looking good," she thinks.

"...we could drive somewhere, have a picnic..." Tommy continues.

"Did I say everything I could have?" She thinks, "why does he always mention Autumn? She seems to be his only flaw. Such an interesting guy showing an interest in such a bland girl just because she is beautiful. But he's over that, he should be -"

"Hey baby, what do you think?"

"What did you say?" Jane says.

"What do you think? Is it a good idea?"

"Sure, I may have to work, but it would be great."

"But I already told you, I said Friday, I know you don't work on Fridays. We could have a sleepover on Thursday and wake up and leave. I think we should get away for a day."

"You are so cute sometimes." She leans over and kisses him, then kisses him again, this time longer, and again with open mouths. She unbuttons his pants, soiled with beer and stained with bleach from his job. She pulls him closer to her as she sits on the chair. She allows him to reach under her shirt, she feels him get hard through his boxers. She enjoys giving him her dividends of affection to keep him around, to keep her company, not that having sex with him is unbearable, in fact, it is wonderful, it is really one of the main reasons she stayed with him despite his unbearable flaws and their underwhelming connection.

Something boiling over the pot, spilling a white fluid on the floor, breaks Jane's thoughts. Jane laughs and almost immediately Tommy removes his hand from under her shirt, and quickly turns to shut off the heat, forgetting his pants around his ankles, and promptly falls face-first on to the kitchen floor. Jane, laughing, runs to the stove and turns off the heat. She then walks over to Tommy and says,

“My fallen hero” with her hand clasped over her heart, looking up at the ceiling she smiled coyly, batting her eyelashes ironically, damsel-in-distress style.

Tommy smiles and says, “Fuck you.” And with all the electrics safely turned off she straddles him and resumes the kissing. He really is enormous, but that’s not supposed to matter. He is inside of her. She closes her eyes. She tries to picture Daniel’s face, to conjure him up from her recent memory, she’s done it so often it’s usually natural and easy, but now she can’t. Whenever she has nearly sculpted his imagined figure she is distracted by something Tommy says or does, only to open her eyes and dissolve the half formed image. She gives up and watches Tommy now, curling his upper lip, she spits out a laugh she can’t contain.

“What is it, you know this isn’t the best time to laugh, grips of passion and all,” he says, still moving, slower now, inside of her.

“I’m sorry, you just make this face, it’s not a bad laugh, it’s an affectionate laugh.”

“Hey Jane?”

“Yeah, babe.”

“Fuck you,” he says smiling.

“Hey Tommy?”

“What?”

“You already are.”

Through the thin walls of Tommy’s apartment his middle aged neighbor hears laughing peppered with moaning. He hides his jealousy under his vicarious happiness, “two kids in love,” he thinks putting on his headphones.

As he always does, he wakes up first, he brings her coffee to rise her before he leaves for work. “It looks like you had a little accident baby. Don’t worry about it and don’t forget Friday,” he said as he leaves. She sits up and realizes that she has stained his sheets, she has her period. Normally she would have left them there, apologizing and expect him to change and clean them. Instead, she stays a little later today and washes his sheets, meanwhile smoking cigarettes and reading some books around his house. Self-help books, Flannery O’Conner short stories, books on bartending. She replaces the sheets and tapes a note to the bed.

A rhyming couplet for Tommy

(I couldn’t think of anything dirtier.)

Flip page over for couplet

The other side of the paper, in sharp straight black permanent marker reads:

One girl and one spot

Were here, but now they’re not.

She thinks she is so fucking funny sometimes. She acquires a new pleasure out of leaving this note, thinking of him finding the paper beneath the sheets and reading it, laughing out loud when she wasn’t there. Her presence still with him.

Days later she is working. For some celestial reason she is not expecting Daniel. This night she is wearing her hair pulled back in three braids, three cornrows, it isn't the most becoming look, but it was the most practical. It is a Saturday night and the café will get busy. She is working with Anne, a thin outdoorsy type a few years younger, with dark skin and smooth gestures.

During a lull in the crowd she begins wiping down the tables to get away from the bar. She is sweating and tired. She goes outside and smokes a cigarette, watching people pass by from her perch. She is thinking of Tommy. Her body would surge with pangs of pleasure when recalling sex with him. She blurts out a laugh when she thinks of him falling on the kitchen floor.

From her perch she sees Daniel walk by. He doesn't notice her, passes, and walks into the café. Through the window, she watches him buy a coffee from Anne. They're laughing, he is standing straight, masculine. He makes small gestures with his hands and forearm; he sporadically brushes a part of his hair back even though it isn't in his face, or corrects the balance of his glasses on his nose. Anne stands shyly, her eyes shifting; she obviously does not want to talk to him. She keeps looking around, smiling, standing in the same place. Finally he leaves. Jane watches him walk his coffee past the bar to an open table, sit down and take out a computer.

Jane stabs out her cigarette and walks into the café.

"Anne," she says coming behind the bar. "I used to have the biggest crush on that guy. We worked together on this nature project almost a year ago, we went on one date and we haven't seen him since."

"Really," Anne responds. "He just invited me to a party. I guess his friends all live in a house near here and they are having a band or something. You should go, my boyfriend's band is performing right now, so I'm going there right after we finish. But I said I maybe would go."

Jane is jealous.

"It has been so long. He probably forgot about our night. God that was so cliché, that night..." she keeps rambling, mostly to herself now.

"You should go talk to him."

"I'm too nervous right now, and I don't look cute. I need some time." Jane glances over to where he is sitting. His face is glowing with the reflected light of the computer screen.

She waits a half hour and when she has to go to the bathroom sits down beside him and says, "What's cookin' good lookin'," a phrase she learned from Tommy.

"I have to work on my dissertation. It's due in a few weeks, I'm starting to panic a little. When it's finished I'm leaving town." He only looks up once, after he says 'dissertation' and he seems to look right past Jane.

"Where are you staying for now?"

"I'm staying on the couch at my buddies place. I moved all my stuff."

"Will you have time to go out tonight, I know of a party."

"Yeah, well, my friends are having a party, 398 Carroll street..."

"That was the one I heard of."

“You and your friend should come. I’m sure it will be a blast.” Jane wonders why he comes off so cheesy, why the conversation is so strained. “Why did he invite ‘you and your friend?’” she thought, “why not just me?”

He wouldn’t look up from his computer. He keeps staring and typing. After that one glance his eyes don’t even move in her direction.

“All right, I’ll leave you.” Jane says. Daniel looks up now, smiling.

“Thanks,” he says.

Jane feels defeated. She has spent hours of her emotional time thinking of him, conjuring him, being theoretically perfect for him and now this. His almost total denial of her humanity. His total denial of their spark.

Jane walks away towards the bathroom. He granted her nothing. He wouldn’t even smile, refused to look her in the face. She was some irritating voice interrupting the flow of his thoughts. His mediocre thoughts. As she shuts the bathroom door behind her something devastating sparks within. The phrase, ‘mediocre thoughts,’ keeps repeating in her head, like a mantra, as if distinct and whispering voices were saying it from every crevice of her brain. Her thoughts are mediocre. She is the vain one here. She isn’t different and strong. She isn’t wild and energetic. She is just a silly girl obsessing about a boy that forgot about her long ago. She has wasted so much time, so much time on this impossibility. She never accounted for the possibility of him not feeling it. The possibility that she was only infusing some emotion into something that wasn’t there. Of course you can’t really orchestrate other people, not without being manipulative, not if it is supposed to be real and natural. Why didn’t she see it before? Of course it was impossible, of course there was nothing. She pulls the top to the toilet seat down at sat.

After a few minutes, the welling tears are pushed back from where they came from and she goes back behind the counter to help Anne. Hours later, when the café is closing Daniel comes up with his empty cup.

“You two should come tonight,” Daniel says looking at Anne.

“Well, maybe, I’m going to the end of my boyfriends show first,” says Anne.

“Ahh, he wont mind, come, be festive. I know Jane will show you a time, she is notorious for that.” Jane turns towards them and smiles at him sarcastically, squinting her eyes tightly. “Well, I must leave. Hopefully you will be there.” Still watching Anne. “Later, Jane.”

He leaves and they close the café, Jane fighting to push back the tears, to erase the haunting words from her mind, ‘mediocre...’ She walks back to her apartment, the whole way impatiently waiting to call Tommy. His number itches under her fingertips. She needs him to console her, rub her back and stroke her hair.

She enters her house and calls, it is past midnight but he doesn’t have to work in the morning and would have probably just fallen asleep. After the second ring he answers his phone, he is wide awake.

“Tommy, hey baby”

“Who is this?”

“Come on you tool, Its Jane.”

“Oh, hey. Are you calling to apologize finally?”

“What are you talking about Tommy?”

“How you didn’t show up on Thursday night and then I thought you were-”

"Oh, Tommy I am so sorry, I completely forgot. Things have been crazy-"

"Hold on please, can you just listen to me right now? I thought you were going to come in the morning, like you couldn't come out here because work ran late or something. When you didn't show I called your apartment and your roommate said you were out, walking around, shopping or something. Jane, I was planning this, I even made sandwiches and bought wine and dressed up."

"Tommy-"

"At one point I was really falling for you, but I think it was because I didn't know you well enough, because I wanted to fall in love. You know how people do that." His voice calms, "but, even you have to admit it doesn't seem like we really have a connection..."

"Are you breaking up with me?"

"Look Jane, you haven't been treating me that well, you don't really listen. You're just occupied with your own life, I don't really know why you have me around."

Jane hears a voice in the background, Tommy seems to be addressing someone in the room.

"Is someone else there?" Jane asks.

"Well, I mean you haven't been around, and I guess I'll just tell you now, I ran into Kris the other day, I just felt like giving it another chance with her. I need some affection right now and she's willing to pay attention to me. She wants to be involved; she wants to make me happy. Anyway, this shouldn't matter. You forgot about me."

"Did you get the note I left you?" Silent tears carve rivulets down Jane's cheeks. She can't fight. She gives up.

"What, that couplet? It would have been funny a long time ago. I'm sorry Jane, we shouldn't be doing this over the phone, we'll get together and talk about this some other time, I don't want to be cruel."

"You know, Tom, that won't be necessary, have a nice life."

"Jane, don't get-" she hangs up the phone.

She looks down at the phone as she slowly, mechanically places it back on its receiver. She is alone in the apartment. She can't move, moving is so hard, so deliberate. She stares at the phone; she stares at it as if it had some kind of hidden meaning, as if it could help her and console her. Suddenly her imagination takes hold of her. Images of Tommy and Kris appear in her view, but she can't close her eyes, it would be no use. All the while she can't stop the whisperings, the almost unintelligible muttering of 'mediocre,' 'mediocre.'

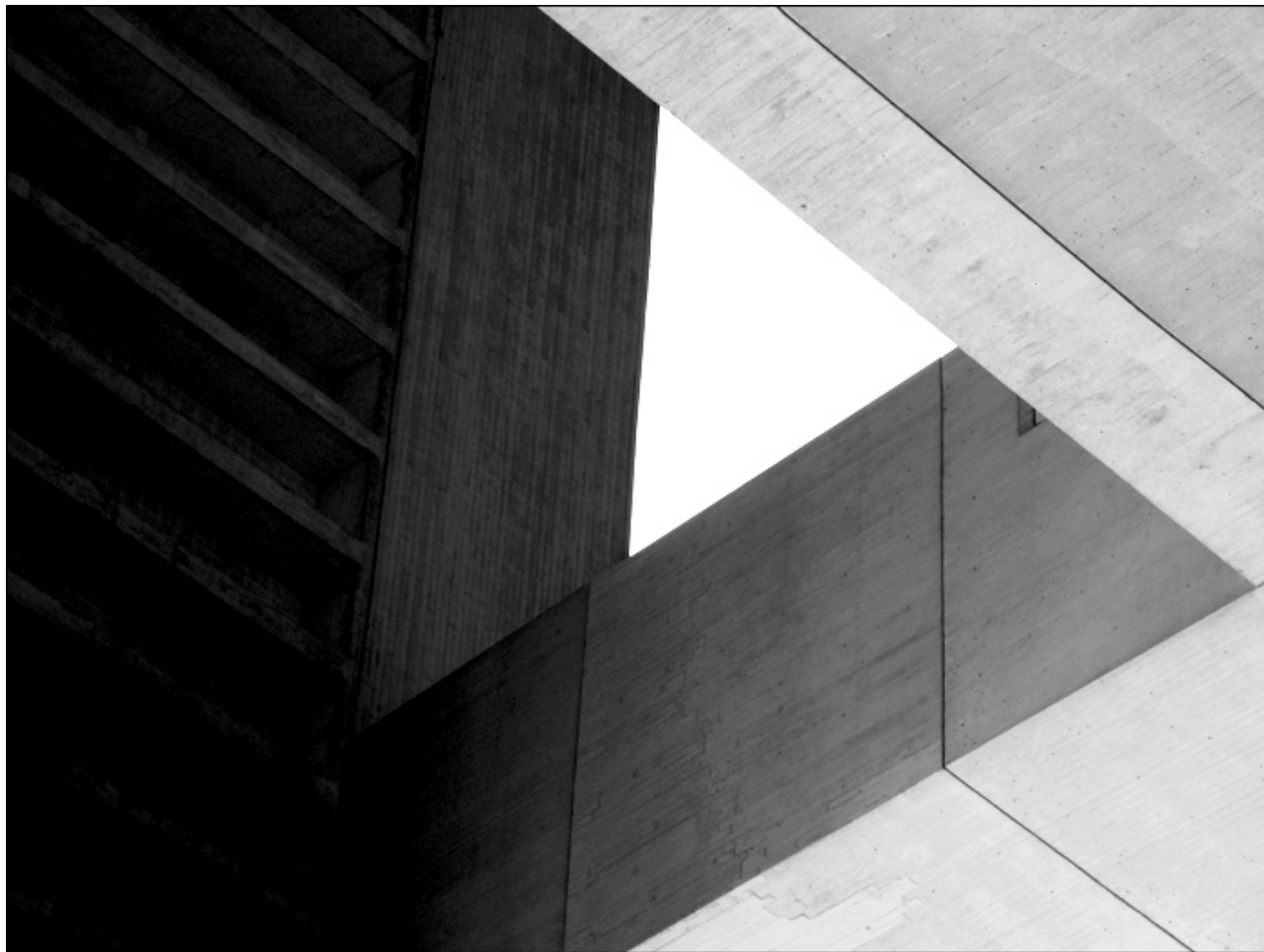
Then she straightens up, eyes red from tears trying to push themselves out. She throws the phone across the room, leaving a mark on the wall and went into her bedroom, takes off her clothes, grabs a towel off the back of her door. She picks up the phone.

"Hey Anne," she says. "Do you feel like going to this party?" "All right. I'll meet you at your place in an hour."

by Emily Lucks



by Yasir Nawaz



by Konstantin Shishkin

Spiders

So now she knows
I'm deathly afraid
of spiders, and I'm
guessing she'll buy
a pet tarantula this
afternoon, name it
after me;
still, there is something
glorious, something honey
brown about how she
trivializes my shortcomings.
She could have held my hand
understandingly, or berated
me with, "They're fucking
spiders, tough guy...
spiders," but instead
she smirked, searching
her room, newly reorganized,
for an eight-legged beast
to throw on me.
Never a self-indulgent moment
with her. After a half
hour I couldn't take
it anymore, called her
God's retort to pacemakers,
blood pressure medication.
She laughed with those vicious
teeth of hers, kissed me,
and now all I can think
is how badly I want to see
her, so she can further
eradicate irrational fears,
or kill me in the process.
Fucking spiders.

by Billy Tobenkin

Wear

My father wears
a heavy brass cross
slung from his thick neck.
Below jackets and shirts
and nestled in the hair of his chest
it burrows into him, sweet secret.
And from time to time
as green patina and the salt of his
live sweat
settle in its carefully turned grooves,
he takes it off and
scrubs the world's grime from it,
removing layer upon layer of meaning compacted,
peeling from God
the thin skin of himself.

by Anne Giedinghagen



by Yasir Nawaz

There are places that whisper,
homes left abandoned to wilt under rot.
Now, paint peeled and porch sagged
 but once, in the starkest sunlight
plank bent and grass-choked
 brushing curtains aside,
window shattered and roof smashed
 hands stroked with Windex, warm water, dry towels.

If a place is the grave of its moments
there's a tombstone in Kansas
that's two stories high.

by Dmitry Berenson

